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Official Records

59th plenary meeting
Friday, 19 November 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Jordán-Pando (Bolivia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 20 *(continued)*

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/619)

(a) **Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations**

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/154 and Add.1)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.17/Rev.1)

(b) **Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions**

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/54/129/Rev.1, A/54/130/Rev.1, A/54/153, A/54/278, A/54/294, A/54/295, A/54/296, A/54/350, A/54/421, A/54/462, A/54/534)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.29)

(c) **Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster**

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/449)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.22)

(d) **Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development**

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/217)

(e) **Assistance to the Palestinian people**

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/134)

Mrs. Kumari (India): We thank the Secretary-General for the reports which are under discussion today. They are comprehensive and respond to the importance that the international community attaches to the crucial issue of humanitarian assistance.

India accords the highest importance to the provision by the United Nations of humanitarian assistance to those in need, in accordance with the established guiding principles so clearly outlined in section I of the annex to resolution 46/182. These principles are valid and time-tested and must be observed. Humanitarian assistance

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must continue to be based on neutrality, impartiality and full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States. It must be provided with the consent of the affected countries and on their appeal, and it must respect the primacy of the role of the affected State in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.

We are therefore happy to observe that the second humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council earlier this year reaffirmed that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with, and with due respect for, these principles. We support all humanitarian activities under the auspices of the United Nations within these parameters. What we cannot accept is any assertion that the offer or availability of humanitarian assistance by the United Nations can confer any right for humanitarian intervention, for which there is no legal basis under the United Nations Charter.

Despite its own resource constraints, India provides substantial humanitarian assistance, in the spirit of South-South solidarity, to those affected by natural disasters or other humanitarian emergencies. Some recent examples include our assistance to the peoples of Afghanistan, Palestine, Bangladesh, Sudan and Tajikistan as well as the Central American and Caribbean countries, which suffered devastating hurricanes last year.

We are, however, deeply concerned that the levels of funding for humanitarian assistance have been declining over the last few years, both in absolute terms and also as a proportion of programme requirements. During the past year, some of the appeals were funded at the woefully low level of 4 per cent of the overall requirements. Similarly, while estimated economic losses due to natural disasters tripled to $90 billion in 1998, the relief assistance made available by the international community was hardly $1 billion, as indicated in paragraph 31 of the report (A/54/154) before us. There is therefore an urgent need to ensure provision of adequate financial resources for the implementation of activities related to humanitarian assistance, while ensuring at the same time that such resources are additional to, and not diverted from, the already scarce resources for development.

The widespread perception that this decline in resources for humanitarian assistance is often related to the political predilections of donors to various crises or to levels of media interest also needs to be addressed. We fully support the view of the Secretary-General that humanitarian assistance should not be driven by media coverage, politics or geography. Its sole criterion should be human need. Otherwise, as the Secretary- General has observed, if we are not true to this ethic, we will be accused of inconsistency at best and hypocrisy at worst. Considering that the vast majority of humanitarian emergencies relate to natural disasters, it is perplexing to note that the attention these crises attract relative to complex humanitarian emergencies is so disproportionately inadequate. We must redouble our efforts to correct these dangerous anomalies.

At the previous session of the General Assembly, which is the primary organ dealing with humanitarian issues, we had called for a consolidated report by the Emergency Relief Coordinator on the implications of underfunding, including forced changes in priorities and cancellation of activities. We noted in paragraph 11 of the report the dangerous implications of such uneven sectoral funding, which does not ensure a necessary minimum of care.

The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), addressing the Security Council a few months back, said:

> "Humanitarian assistance cannot be used as an instrument for bringing political pressure to bear on any party to a conflict." (*S/PV. 3977, p. 3*)

We therefore strongly support the view of the Secretary-General that uneven geographical funding threatens to undermine the basic principle of humanitarian assistance, that is, provision of aid irrespective of political considerations. We are, however, surprised to observe that the programme narratives of the sections on humanitarian assistance in the budget documents indicate that strategic coordination of humanitarian assistance with political strategy and human rights objectives would be a focus of the policy and analysis subprogramme.

Clear distinctions need to be made in defining the relationship between the functions and imperatives of peacekeeping and peacemaking and the principle of humanitarian access. Similarly, distinctions must be maintained between the political, peacekeeping, human rights and humanitarian work of the United Nations. These activities may be mutually reinforcing, but the distinctions are nevertheless both valid and crucial if the trust that the United Nations enjoys in the field of humanitarian assistance is to be retained. We are

therefore glad to note, in paragraph 14 of document A/54/154, that the United Nations proposes strictly to maintain the distinction between humanitarian negotiations for access and security, and negotiations on a political settlement of the conflict. We also note with satisfaction that this distinction was recognized by the Economic and Social Council during its most recent humanitarian affairs segment.

We hope that the joint launching of the consolidated appeals, begun this year, will assist efforts for resource mobilization. We also support increases in the capacity of the United Nations to respond immediately to requests for emergency disaster assistance, and we would be similarly supportive of the delegation of authority to recruit emergency field staff. We also welcome the proposals to make Central Emergency Revolving Fund resources available for natural disasters, as well as the proposals to utilize the resources available under the Central Emergency Revolving Fund to partially redress the geographical and sectoral imbalance in the funding of humanitarian appeals. We commend the innovative practice of the transitional appeal in the aftermath of hurricane Mitch. Although it did not receive the financial support required, we would suggest that the United Nations continue with this and similar innovative measures at the request of concerned Governments. However, these mechanisms, welcome as they are, will prove to be of limited value until the question of the overall paucity of donor response and its uneven distribution are addressed.

In this climate of shrinking resource flows, it is essential to ensure optimal and effective utilization of available funds. Capacities existing in developing countries, which are often closer to the site of natural disasters or other humanitarian emergencies and therefore available at lower cost, would certainly provide a viable modality for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of limited resources. Existing structures for disaster mitigation and relief assistance in developing countries should be fruitfully utilized for providing training to humanitarian personnel.

We note with concern, in paragraph 60 of the report in document A/54/154, that the release of funds for rehabilitation during the transition phase following emergency relief measures in the wake of natural disasters is usually too late and subject to serious political, procedural and administrative constraints. In order to effectively redress this situation, we strongly support the Secretary-General's view, expressed in paragraph 65 of the report, that funds for reconstruction should be made available sooner and with significantly less onerous procedures than is the case today. This cannot be overemphasized, since, as noted in the report, capacities for immediate relief often exist within the public administration of the affected countries, but as the needs shift from emergency situations to the longer term, the lack of capacities, including financial resources, becomes dramatically apparent.

I would like to briefly touch upon the new and emerging causes of humanitarian crises in this era of globalization, such as those triggered by the impact of financial crises, leading to dramatically rising levels of dire poverty and political instability. In a sense, this is a good governance issue requiring action by the Governments of countries from whose unregulated trading floors some of these crises have originated. Furthermore, the phenomenon of economic globalization has weakened the authority of the State in crucial socio-economic sectors, thereby adversely affecting its political legitimacy. In our view, the need of the hour is to strengthen the nation State and not to further weaken it. In the ultimate analysis, in any crisis, whether economic or political, the final guarantee of the well-being of all is the presence of a responsible and functioning State. Furthermore, as the External Affairs Minister of India said in addressing this General Assembly, strong States are essential to ensure a strong United Nations. A United Nations composed of weak States can only weaken the United Nations.

We note in paragraph 29 of the report in document A/54/154 that the Secretary-General has asked the Emergency Relief Coordinator to ensure that gaps in assistance to internally displaced persons are addressed. In undertaking these tasks, we should be cautious about uncritically endorsing new concepts that are still evolving in other forums. Similarly, we would be unable to support ideas calling for greater collaboration between United Nations humanitarian assistance and the Comprehensive Development Framework of the World Bank. The Comprehensive Development Framework is still a pilot project, with several questions remaining unanswered about its utility and effectiveness even in normal developmental situations. Its application to countries in crisis would be tantamount to the imposition of an additional burden, without any guarantee of additional benefits, on those who are most ill-placed to bear them.

We agree with the comments in paragraphs 86 to 90 of the report outlining the recurrent gaps in the context of the reintegration of returnees, demobilization, issues

relating to children and comprehensive mine action programmes. But the central question of transitions in complex humanitarian emergencies is strengthening the role of the Governments concerned. We fully support the view of the Secretary-General that while all elements of post-conflict reconstruction are important, failures in structuring assistance in a manner that helps rebuild the capacity of government to effectively regulate competing claims of different sections of society would produce a high risk of return to conflict.

India accords the highest importance to disaster reduction and prevention, as well as to the provision of relief and urgent steps towards rehabilitation and reconstruction when natural disasters strike. Like several other countries, India has put in place a central focal point for natural disaster reduction and response. A Natural Disaster Management Programme has been implemented as a central scheme since December 1993 to enhance national capacity for disaster reduction, preparedness and mitigation. The scheme also attempts to enhance the level of awareness of the local communities about disasters they may face and to prepare them adequately to face any crisis situation in the future. We are seeking to achieve this through human resource development, research and consultancy services, documentation of major events and the establishment of centres for disaster management at the State level. These activities are being undertaken not only through governmental departments, but also through non-governmental organizations and scientific and technical institutions. Efforts are also being made to fully involve the media in these activities.

Recently, a week-long international workshop and regional meeting on storm surges was organized jointly by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the World Meteorological Organization, in cooperation with the Government of India. At the meeting it was decided to create a regional project office in New Delhi to develop necessary infrastructure for providing effective and timely storm surge forecasts and warnings. The project will also encourage investment for sustainable coastal development and thus reduce the aggravation of poverty caused by storm surge disasters in the region.

A crisis management group has been established in the Cabinet secretariat to ensure a coordinated response to disasters when they strike. Recently, two cyclones wrought serious devastation in the Indian province of Orissa. As in the past, we have tackled the task of providing immediate relief through our efforts and institutions, and we will continue to do so as we move on to the next stage, that of reconstruction and rehabilitation. We are very grateful for the solidarity shown by the international community, including the General Assembly and its President, and by the Secretary-General. The high-level task force constituted for rehabilitation and reconstruction will draw up a reconstruction plan for the area. At that stage, should the Government of India need external assistance in the implementation of its national priorities, we will approach the international community accordingly.

I would now like to refer briefly to agenda item 20 (e), on assistance to the Palestinian people. India, despite its own limitations, has been contributing to the process of assistance to the Palestinian people through scholarships and cultural exchange programmes. India provided specialized training to 58 students of Palestine during the period April 1998 to March 1999. All expenditure on training costs, including board and lodging, is borne by the Government of India. India also pledged $1 million at the Washington donors conference in October 1995 and another $1 million at the subsequent pledging conference in Paris in January 1996. These pledges have already been honoured through full disbursement. At the third donors conference, held in Washington on 30 November 1998, India pledged an additional $1 million as assistance to Palestine. Of this, the sum of $300,000 has already been disbursed to the University of Al Azhar in Gaza for the construction of two additional floors to its library; the remainder will be utilized for the human resource development programme.

Although the Assembly will take up the item on Afghanistan later, I wish to note that the humanitarian situation there is assuming serious proportions. Continuing discrimination against girls, women and religious minorities is of great concern. The forced displacement of the civilian population by the Taliban, the torching of residential houses, the burning of crops, the cutting of trees, the deliberate destruction of sparse infrastructure including the irrigation system in the Shumali plains, the indiscriminate aerial bombing of civilians and the denial of access to the Shumali plains are impeding the provision of relief material to thousands of internally displaced persons. We are concerned also at the worsening plight of civilians in the Hazarajat area and in Bamian. We have contributed to alleviating the suffering of the Afghan people as best as we could, by sending humanitarian assistance. Our efforts in this direction, which are outlined in paragraph 69 of the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/54/297, will continue both bilaterally and through the United Nations system. We hope that the constraints on

humanitarian assistance that were outlined by the Secretary-General last year, and that presumably account for his reference in paragraph 2 of his report to a complicated web of external and internal political factors affecting humanitarian assistance, will be soon overcome.

I wish to express my delegation's deep appreciation and admiration for the dedication and commitment with which many relief and assistance organizations and personnel, both United Nations and non-United Nations, are functioning under the most difficult and trying conditions to bring succour to those in need. They often work under daily threats to their own personal safety and security and deserve our unstinting praise. The threats faced by humanitarian personnel as well as by United Nations staff have been clearly brought out in the addendum to the Secretary-General's report (A/54/154/Add.1). We are concerned that there has been an increasing trend towards such threats and towards threats and violence against all those protected under international humanitarian law. We salute those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the promotion of our cause, and we trust that such cases will become rare and, it is hoped, will cease in the years to come. However, we need serious introspection to ensure that the increasing attacks on humanitarian aid workers do not take place on account of humanitarian assistance being perceived as biased and hence as part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

It is clear that the safety and security of those providing humanitarian assistance will not be ensured by the signature of United Nations conventions or by the resolutions solemnly adopted by the General Assembly. They can be ensured only when humanitarian assistance is perceived to be genuinely impartial and neutral, and when it is provided in accordance with the guiding principles so clearly enunciated by the General Assembly.

Mr. Khetagurov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): On the whole, the Russian delegation has a positive assessment of the work that has been accomplished on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

We believe that much of the praise for this should go to Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. During this year alone, beyond his everyday administration of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, he has personally been carrying out the most important missions, entrusted to him by the Secretary-General, including heading the United Nations Inter-Agency Needs Assessment Mission in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, leading on a temporary basis the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, and now heading the United Nations Mission in East Timor. We wish the Emergency Relief Coordinator success in the fulfilment of this new mission. We also wish success to the recently appointed Officer-in-Charge of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Carolyn McAskie.

We consider disaster relief activities to be of great importance for the implementation of humanitarian operations, especially with respect to guaranteeing access to those in need of assistance, the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, coordination in the field and strengthening the early-warning capacity and natural-disaster preparedness of countries. In our view, it is important to strengthen the relationship among peacekeeping, peace-building, the protection of human rights, the provision of humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and development.

At the summer session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the agreed conclusions of the humanitarian affairs segment gave guidelines to United Nations system agencies and bodies functioning within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) for further improving coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance, particularly in such a complicated and important area as the transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development after natural disasters and in other complex emergencies. It is an important matter of principle that the agreed conclusions have confirmed the fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance stipulated in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182: humanity, neutrality and impartiality. There can be no exemptions from these principles. Humanitarian assistance can and should be provided only on the basis of these criteria.

We recognize as a positive development that the Council acknowledged the necessity of giving proper consideration to the humanitarian impact of sanctions in order to minimize their negative consequences. As regards improving strategic planning of emergency operations, we particularly take note of the role of consolidated inter-agency appeals. To our regret, funding of such appeals has been extremely uneven, mainly because of an absence of political will on the part of the donors, sometimes contrary to the fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance.

We highly value actions by the United Nations system in coordinating steps to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters. Taking into consideration the sound financial situation of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF), we consider it appropriate to use CERF resources to fund activities related to natural disasters and technological catastrophes.

We also recognize the importance of the agreed conclusions of ECOSOC concerning the need for a comprehensive approach by the United Nations and other interested partners in the transition to rehabilitation and reconstruction in the Balkans. Unfortunately, adequate steps are being taken neither to restore the economy of Yugoslavia, destroyed by the bombings, nor to aid in providing humanitarian assistance to the population of the entire territory of that country. This can be seen from conclusions in the report on the status of the "Electricity and Heating in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: winter 1999-2000", prepared at the request of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). If emergency measures are not taken, Yugoslavia will face an energy and, consequently, a humanitarian crisis during the coming winter. The experts of a group called "Focus", a joint humanitarian initiative of Austria, Greece, Russia and Switzerland which assessed the condition of destroyed and damaged heating equipment and the systems of energy and water supply, came to the same conclusions. As assessed by the experts of Focus, the situation with regard to public health and the environment is also difficult. This can also be seen in the report of the Joint UNEP-Habitat Balkan Task Force. Whole branches of industry and infrastructure have been destroyed. There are hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced people. That situation requires that the international community adopt urgent measures, which is the aim of the draft resolution we have prepared on this issue.

We appreciate the role the United Nations in dealing with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. In spite of the fact that 13 years have already passed since the Chernobyl catastrophe, its consequences are still acute due to their material, lasting nature. At present, Russia is implementing several federal programmes, including for the protection of the population against the impact of catastrophes for the period to the year 2000, and for children of Chernobyl and for housing for the catastrophe mitigators.

Despite its difficult economic situation, Russia allocates considerable funds to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. Yet a shortage of funds for this purpose persists. International assistance, including that of the United Nations, has been an important addition to our own efforts in implementing Chernobyl projects. Only yesterday, 18 November, there was a meeting of the Quadripartite Committee for Coordination on Chernobyl at United Nations Headquarters, with the participation of the United Nations, the affected countries and the donor countries. Unfortunately none of the priority Chernobyl projects for each of the three countries affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe has been funded.

The United Nations system remains the only one which, according to its capacity, is at least trying to facilitate funding and implementation of the approved projects. In this regard, we would like to recognize the positive role of United Nations bodies such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Labour Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the United Nations Development Programme, as well as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and a number of non-governmental organizations which have helped mitigate medical, economic, environmental, social, psychological and other consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. We should also like to note the work done by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Chernobyl.

The disaster has led to severe problems in the affected territories. At the same time, it has provided a tremendous source of information for the international community which has allowed others to prevent a similar tragedy. By that, we believe, donor assistance has been repaid in many ways.

The relevant draft resolution prepared by Belarus, Russia and Ukraine contains an appeal to the United Nations to continue its Chernobyl-related activities and calls upon donor countries and organizations to support the relief efforts of the three countries, including in the framework of the United Nations Appeal for International Cooperation on Chernobyl last spring.

Turning to another area of humanitarian need, we appreciate the efforts of the international community to provide aid to the population of Afghanistan without any discrimination. Such aid should complement efforts to promote the readiness of the Afghani parties to search for a political solution to the conflict, to ensure safety of the activities of international organizations in Afghanistan, to

deny haven to international terrorists and to take measures on fighting illicit drug trafficking.

We think it important that the General Assembly should again adopt this year a resolution on emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and rehabilitation in Tajikistan, since in spite of the positive developments which have taken place in this country this year, the general humanitarian situation continues to be acute and a considerable part of the Tajik population still needs assistance from the international community, all the more so since such assistance is an investment in peace and normalcy in that country.

It is necessary to continue to pay priority attention to the complex emergencies in Africa. Humanitarian assistance should be provided to all affected people and should promote peaceful settlement of conflicts.

In recent years, we have witnessed a growing number of large-scale natural disasters, including the hurricanes Mitch and George, earthquakes in Afghanistan, Colombia, Turkey, Greece and other areas, floods in India, China and Bangladesh, forest fires in Brazil, Indonesia and Russia. The human and material losses have grown considerably. In 1998 alone more than 50,000 people died as a result of natural disasters, and the economic damage approached $100 billion. These disasters have become a serious destabilizing factor. Reducing the damage caused by such catastrophes and addressing their consequences requires the joint efforts of the international community as well as the use of state-of-the-art technologies and considerable resources.

The experience of recent years — in particular, with addressing the consequences of tremendous earthquakes, forest fires and other emergencies — has vividly confirmed this. At the same time, it has shed light on a number of problems, such as the insufficient coordination of the activities of rescue units from different countries, the absence of a clear division of labour and the inadequate use of the most modern technologies in relief efforts.

The head of the Russian delegation, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr. Ivanov, in his statement at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, already spoke of the importance of considering establishing an international agency for emergencies which would unite international efforts and mechanisms so as to deal with the consequences of natural and man-made disasters and to coordinate urgent, expert approaches to saving human lives in the first hours and days after a disaster. What benefits do we see in coordinating the efforts of national and international rescue services through the establishment of such an international mechanism?

Joint actions by national rescue services, a kind of international grouping of rescue operations using transport and special-task aircraft to support the natural-disaster relief activities and rescue and humanitarian operations have already been tested. A number of countries, including Russia, have experience in using long-range aviation for transportation of rescue helicopters and rescue units prepared for immediate involvement in rescue operations. It is important to organize promptly the coordination of activities of rescue units arriving in areas of emergencies. To this end on each continent a focal point for mobilizing and coordinating actions should be established by making use of one or another national-level rescue mechanisms.

As a first stage we could consider the establishment, under the United Nations auspices, of a network composed of the country-level, bilateral, regional and multilateral units that have been created to address the consequences of natural and man-made disasters. This network would allow for expeditious and coordinated responses to these natural and man-made catastrophes. We believe that such a network would complement, rather than duplicate, the existing United Nations mechanisms in this field.

Russian and international experience in international efforts to address the consequences of major disasters shows that for the successful rescue of those who are still alive — I emphasize, those who are still alive — it is necessary to work out in advance — before the announcement of any given catastrophe — the following crucial elements. These are the establishment of a global rapid notification network, strengthening the coordination of countries' emergency response units, and, of course, the division of labour among all national participants of international rescue operations. There also need to be exchanges of experiences and the introduction of new rescue technologies. These, in our view, are basic components around which an international agency for emergencies could be built.

It seems to us that the consideration of an idea of an international mechanism to resolve these problems should begin as soon as possible, and that this mechanism should constitute an important contribution to the implementation of the follow-up to the International Decade for Natural

Disaster Reduction, along with the international disaster-reduction strategy and the activities of the Inter-Agency Task Force and the inter-agency secretariat operating under the direct authority of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

We hope that at a certain stage a comprehensive consideration of our idea by the Member States will lead to the adoption of a relevant resolution on this issue.

Mr. Larraín (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): For my country, all activities related to humanitarian assistance hold particular significance. This is due to the fact that we have always had to deal with difficult and quite often painful crisis situations caused by natural disasters of various forms and extents. We have also witnessed complex crises such as the ones in Kosovo, Angola, Sierra Leone, among others, whose impact and consequences also affect us.

In this context we commend the work carried out to date by the United Nations in the sphere of humanitarian assistance. In particular we are thankful for the interesting report of the Secretary-General in which he deals in depth with the most varied aspects of these crises.

In addition we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, for the outstanding work he has been doing in directing the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). We wish him every success in his new assignment: Head of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor.

Turning to the work of the United Nations, we believe that the activities of the Economic and Social Council, in particular of its humanitarian segment, should contribute to generating a climate of trust regarding humanitarian work. It is essential to highlight the strictly non-political and impartial character of these activities. We feel that this character must be given priority, both in the coordination of this work and the policy guidelines for it, as well as, by extension, in the activities of humanitarian assistance organizations and agencies.

Preserving this character in the humanitarian sphere is not only one of the fundamental bases for effective international action; it is also an indispensable precondition for transparency in humanitarian responses and international cooperation. There is no doubt that these elements are of particular importance for maintaining the credibility of humanitarian work and its universal worth, as well as for dispelling any shadow of a doubt regarding interventionist aims or attempts to impinge upon the sovereignty of States.

In addition, the principles and norms of international humanitarian law urgently need preserving and strengthening. For Chile the efforts being carried out to avoid and/or to ease the suffering of civilian populations is particularly important. Among these I would highlight these populations' most disadvantaged and vulnerable sectors, such as women and children, who are the principal victims of humanitarian crises.

In the efforts undertaken to that end, we believe that the United Nations should decisively support the positive contribution being made by civil society, in particular by non-governmental organizations, in the global response to serious humanitarian emergency situations. My country feels that this role must be adequately recognized and encouraged.

In another context, we share the opinion of those who claim that the main responsibility devolves primarily to the State where a humanitarian emergency arises. At the same time, however, we are aware of the need to ensure the availability of international cooperation to assist those States that, given the magnitude of potential crises, may not have adequate capacity to respond or for which this response will be an oppressive burden that threatens their own development. In this regard, we believe that we have important work ahead to develop a rapid reaction and response capacity for dealing with these situations and for assisting countries that do not have their won capacity to address and resolve serious humanitarian problems.

Moreover, there is no doubt that, from the development perspective, the economic, ecological, environmental and social impact on host countries is an issue that requires the full attention of the international community. It is neither reasonable nor just for those countries which, together, assume the enormous burden of massive refugee flows into their territories also to have to bear the high costs of such humanitarian emergencies.

Indeed, the serious damage caused by epidemics, the deterioration of arable land and the environment, and other aspects of humanitarian emergencies poses a terrible and real threat to those host countries — many of which are also affected by disturbing situations of extreme poverty — and to the sustainability of their

development process. We run the risk that the solidarity of these countries will be seriously shaken by the lack of adequate response from the international system to their complex realities, as has happened in the recent past.

Regarding humanitarian emergencies arising out of armed conflict, a political commitment to facilitating the difficult tasks undertaken by humanitarian personnel and to protecting their integrity and safety must be made by all those involved. It is clear that this important aspect of the humanitarian response is also closely linked to the guarantee of transparent and apolitical humanitarian response, in which personnel fully respect the national laws of the State in which such operations are undertaken.

Finally, this would seem to be the appropriate opportunity to refer to the experience we have gained in disaster reduction through the positive impact of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction on this area. The United Nations can make an important contribution to increasing and strengthening international cooperation for prevention.

I would stress, however, that the spirit of good faith in which these activities are undertaken obliges States to abstain from adopting legislation that is incompatible with the principles and standards of international humanitarian law and of internationally recognized human rights.

Finally, Chile fully agrees that there is a need to ensure gender equality in the development of humanitarian policies and activities. In this respect, it would be most interesting were the Emergency Relief Coordinator, together with the Division for the Advancement of Women, periodically to provide information on measures adopted and achievements made to meet this need.

Mr. Albin (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Humanitarian assistance is one of the most noble expressions of the fundamental solidarity of the human spirit in the face of the global challenges of nature and history.

It is regrettable that, in addition to human tragedies caused by natural disasters, emergency situations arise from the perpetuation and eruption of conflicts.

On the eve of the new millennium, when human society has the resources necessary to meet the most pressing needs of the world's peoples, the strengthening of international cooperation for development is a major priority. It is always more costly to cure than to prevent. Development is and will continue to be the best deterrent to conflicts and, at the same time, the most efficient catalyst of efforts to deal with the forces of nature.

Humanitarian assistance is undoubtedly a complex task requiring clearly defined parameters. That is why Mexico supports the guiding principles established in General Assembly resolution 46/182. That important resolution is both a plan of action and a code of conduct for the deployment of international solidarity.

Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. It is essential that it be provided with due respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States, in compliance with the United Nations Charter and always at the request or with the consent of the receiving State.

At the same time, we need to adopt an integral approach that, in accordance with the priorities determined by national Governments, will ensure that the United Nations system is adapted and strengthened effectively to assume its central role of providing leadership and coordinating the efforts of the international community to assist countries affected by natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies, with the full integration of emergency assistance and the tasks of rehabilitation, reconstruction and development.

We share the international concern for the security of humanitarian workers and consider it to be a key element of the efficiency of humanitarian assistance. The greatest possible support for humanitarian personnel is essential. We extend our condolences to the families of those humanitarian workers who have died in the line of duty.

Throughout the world, the impact of natural disasters has increased significantly in terms of the number of catastrophes and victims, as well as of the scale of damage. This has had serious social consequences and severely hindered the economic development of the nations affected. The Government of Mexico offers its condolences and solidarity to all those countries that have been recently struck by natural disasters. We also extend our thanks to those peoples of the world that have offered their sympathy to the people of Mexico in difficult times.

The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and our international activities in addressing the effects of the meteorological phenomena of El Niño,

hurricanes Mitch and Georges, the floods in China and Bangladesh, the earthquakes in Turkey or the cyclone in India, among other disasters, have enabled us to forge a growing awareness and solidarity. The experience gained by the international community has shown the urgency and the necessity of shifting from a response perspective to an integral strategy which in terms of sustainable development worldwide will focus more on preventing and producing natural disasters.

In this regard, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Rio Group, who met in Mexico last May, attached the greatest importance to promoting regional technical cooperation efforts in the field of natural disasters on an ongoing basis for every phase, including of prevention, early warning, emergency, mitigation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Similarly, at the recent summit at Rio de Janeiro, the representatives of Latin America and the Caribbean and of the European Union agreed to set up a programme of cooperation in the area of natural disasters and to establish a system to make effective use of international assistance in all phases.

The United Nations is called upon to play an important role in structuring an integrated international strategy to deal with natural disasters. We urgently need national directories of civil protection organizations with updated inventories of resources available for assistance during disasters, and manuals which will guide us in the effective management of international cooperation. Our Organization must have the answers to the why, how and who in the area of international cooperation for natural disasters.

Given this priority, my country is working actively to achieve the broadest consensus possible in this Assembly for the establishment of an integral international strategy on natural disasters through two ways: providing adequate follow-up on efforts deployed in the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and strengthening international cooperation and humanitarian assistance during natural disasters in all phases.

Humanitarian assistance is a task for all of us and involves us all. In carrying it out, we should bring together the provisions of international law, the framework of efforts and conduct we have agreed on and the promotion and benefit of solidarity among peoples and nations. These are and will continue to be the core of Mexico's contribution to this noble cause of the United Nations.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): Over the last decade the world has seen a growing number of natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies. In particular, natural disasters have been on the rise, spreading destruction and reversing development, their impact aggravated by human activity and poverty. There has also been an increase in the number of civil wars, in which civilian populations are not incidental casualties but direct targets. Conflicts, whether they be new, re-ignited or protracted, are leading to increasingly complex emergencies. A brutal disregard for humanitarian norms places humanitarian workers at risk and denies them access to victims in conflict zones.

This creates a formidable humanitarian agenda. Norway agrees with the Secretary-General when, in his annual report on the work of the Organization, he calls on us to address the root causes, not merely the symptoms.

We must continue to strengthen our capacity to bring humanitarian relief to victims. But we must also vigorously devise more effective strategies to reduce vulnerability and to prevent emergencies from arising in the first place. In short, we must, as the Secretary-General suggests, create a culture of prevention.

Norway welcomes the institutional progress achieved by the United Nations system over the past year in managing the humanitarian agenda. Improved mechanisms for coordination have indeed led to a more effective response capacity and to a more constant focus on meeting the humanitarian challenge. The Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, has consolidated its position as the focal point for the coordination of humanitarian policy. The recently expanded composition and agenda of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs provide an important link between the humanitarian, political and development components of the United Nations system. Last but not least, I would like to recall the many useful meetings of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with the Security Council.

Norway also welcomes the trend towards closer relations between the humanitarian and the political activities of the United Nations at the inter-governmental level, facilitating a move from reaction to prevention in both these spheres. In this regard, I would particularly like to recall the Security Council's extensive debates on post-conflict peace-building and on the causes of conflict

and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, in which the Council endorsed a range of conflict-prevention measures. Only two months ago, the Secretary-General presented to the Council his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/1999/957), containing 40 recommendations. We welcome that the Council, in its resolution 1265 (1999), decided to establish a process to consider further appropriate steps.

The report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/54/154) was considered in full at the humanitarian segment of this year's main session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Allow me to reiterate Norway's appreciation for the achievements reflected in the report, including common country assessments, a stronger resident humanitarian coordinator system, the improved Consolidated Appeals Process and the development of a generic strategic framework now to be tested in Sierra Leone. The humanitarian segment of the ECOSOC provides Governments with a welcome opportunity to conduct focused discussions and provide guidance in this important field. Norway appreciated the more operational and interactive thrust of the segment this year, and we would encourage further development of the format in this direction.

We note in the addendum to the Secretary-General's report that the year 1998, in particular, represented a severe deterioration in the security situation for humanitarian personnel, and that developments in 1999 thus far are equally distressing. In order to stop the indiscriminate violence, threats and harassment that humanitarian workers risk every day, we need to reinforce the respect accorded to humanitarian personnel and those who are carrying out the neutral and impartial work of the United Nations. Perpetrators of violence must be brought to justice. In this context, we view the establishment of the International Criminal Court as paramount. Let me take this opportunity to renew Norway's call for ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Likewise, Norway wishes to express its support for the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, which entered into force earlier this year. We would take this opportunity to encourage a larger number of Member States to ratify and implement this important legal instrument. Norway also urges more Member States to make contributions to the Trust Fund for Security of staff members of the United Nations system.

In dealing with the disasters and emergencies of the past year, our attention has been drawn to the obligation to respond to the humanitarian challenge in a consistent and even-handed way. The evolution of consolidated appeals for humanitarian assistance has been matched by an improved funding response, which now stands at 69 per cent — well over the 54 per cent achieved for the whole of 1998. Unfortunately, significant differences remain between the funding of individual country appeals, while the differences in response as between regions is far less pronounced than had been anticipated earlier this year.

The rights of victims to assistance should always be our point of departure, and their needs should dictate the quality and timeliness of the response — not geography or the nature of the disaster or media coverage. This is, in fact, the backbone of the Norwegian humanitarian strategy, presented by the Minister for International Development and Human Rights earlier this year. Our new strategy aims at achieving a more cohesive national approach to emergency, post-conflict, transition and development issues and is well in line with the Secretary-General's approach in his annual report on the work of the Organization and the programme budget for 2000-2001. An overriding concern of our strategy is the importance of addressing the root causes of conflict and disaster, including poverty, inequality and human rights issues. All responses to a crisis need to be integrated, and recovery should be placed within a broader development framework.

While increasing its contributions to humanitarian assistance, Norway has striven to raise awareness of the need for overlap between humanitarian assistance and long-term development efforts. Thus, we have noted with satisfaction the tendency towards a broader participation of development actors and a better integration of development activities in the consolidated appeals process. The recently issued appeal for East Timor provides a good example of overlap between shorter- and longer-term activities, and integration has been carried forward by the inclusive model adopted for coordination and planning in East Timor. In particular, the participation of non-governmental organizations is a welcome addition, and it will undoubtedly contribute to a more coherent humanitarian and development effort than previously seen.

Improved socio-economic development for the Palestinian people living in the occupied Palestinian territories is of crucial importance to the peace process in

the Middle East. This is why the Norwegian Government in 1998 renewed its commitment to the process by pledging a further $173 million dollars for the period 1999-2003. This pledge includes continued Norwegian contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as well as support to Palestinian institutions focusing on the planning, education, water and energy sectors. The development of sustainable, viable and well-managed public Palestinian institutions will enable the Palestinian Authority to improve living conditions and to meet the future needs of the Palestinian people.

International support and commitment to the peace process are of crucial importance. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, which Norway has been chairing, has provided a forum in which the Palestinian authorities and the international community have been able to express their priorities and concerns. Furthermore, the Ad Hoc Liaison group and the other coordination mechanisms have been facilitating the coordination of assistance to the Palestinian people, enabling adjustments and responses to both short-term and long-term humanitarian needs.

The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East peace process and the personal representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority will continue to play an important role in ensuring the achievement of a coordinated mechanism for United Nations activities. Pending the implementation of a final settlement to the refugee issue, the continued assistance of UNRWA remains indispensable to the Palestinian people.

Progress in the peace process requires continued, committed international support and rapid implementation of the pledges made at the 1998 ministerial conference to support Middle East peace and development, bearing in mind that economic and social development are essential for future peace in the region.

Mr. Huang Xueqi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): In the year soon coming to an end, there has been a considerable increase in the frequency, as well as in the magnitude, of natural disasters that have hit various parts of the world. In addition to some emergencies that have evolved into long-standing problems, there have been eruptions of one new armed conflict after another.

Large numbers of victims of natural disasters, refugees and internally displaced persons continue to live in dire misery. The Chinese delegation is deeply worried at this situation. We deplore the fact that the response from donor countries remains at a low level. We are also concerned at the trend towards imbalance in humanitarian assistance.

In the past 30 years, natural disasters all over the globe have increased threefold, with 90 per cent of the victims living in developing countries. However, humanitarian emergency relief funds provided by the international community have been on the decline, which undoubtedly is making things even more difficult for those victims least able to lift themselves out of misery. Severe natural disasters not only inflict loss of life and property, but are also likely to result in the stagnation, interruption, and, indeed, setbacks in the development process of poor countries already facing tremendous challenges.

The hard-won peace and stability in these countries will be jeopardized as a result. We may well predict that if the current situation is allowed to continue, things will get even worse down the road. The Chinese delegation fully supports the agreed conclusion adopted by the Economic and Social Council earlier this year, which demands that the international community, particularly donor countries, increase contributions to all consolidated appeals. We appeal to the international community, especially the donor countries, to make greater commitments in international relief assistance and to effectively implement the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.

In peacekeeping, as well as in post-conflict peace-building, the United Nations and the international community should strictly abide by the guiding principles laid down in the United Nations Charter and effectively comply with the principles of non-interference in internal affairs and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. United Nations bodies and agencies concerned, as well as regional organizations, should play their due roles within their respective terms of reference. This also applies to the international humanitarian efforts in conflict regions.

The Chinese Government attaches great importance to the important process of transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development, since a smooth transition will provide greater assurance for political stabilization, economic recovery and restoration of the normal life of the people of the countries concerned. We believe that initial plans for rehabilitation, reconstruction and development should be

drawn up while a situation is still in the stage of crisis management and relief programmes are being formulated. With a basic development strategy in place from the very beginning of the reconstruction efforts, gaps in the transitional period will be filled or reduced, thus leading to a more stable transition and, at the same time, achieving a better combination of humanitarian assistance with the strengthening of the disaster management capability of the recipient countries.

The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, now in its last year, is a long-term programme of critical importance to the formulation of international disaster reduction strategies. We believe that disaster reduction and prevention are an integral part of the sustainable development strategy. In international disaster relief efforts, focus should be shifted in future from post-disaster response to disaster-management approaches, including disaster prevention and preparedness. Efforts should be undertaken to gradually establish a sound, comprehensive disaster-relief stand-by mechanism. We welcome the decision adopted by the Economic and Social Council earlier this year on successor arrangements for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, as well as arrangements for the formulation of an international disaster reduction strategy. China, as a country prone to natural disasters, stands ready to participate actively in the discussions and studies in this field and to support and participate in common efforts to reduce and prevent disasters.

The "White Helmet" initiative, as an emergency disaster relief stand-by mechanism offered by States to the United Nations on a voluntary basis with pre-determined specialized human and technical resources, can be an important supplement to rapid and concerted humanitarian relief actions. The initiative, since it conforms to the idea of strengthening disaster relief coordination and reducing losses, deserves widespread and vigorous support. We hope that the United Nations bodies and agencies concerned will undertake further studies of this mechanism to help maximize its applicability and develop it into an active force capable of providing domestic as well as international relief.

The Chinese delegation is pleased with the work undertaken by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in its three core functions, particularly because, despite its severe lack of funds and staff at a time when disasters of every description multiply, it has overcome difficulties, risen to the challenges and responded rapidly to most disasters and emergency situations. The Chinese delegation supports the recommendation in the Secretary General's report that the regular budget provide more funds and staff for OCHA in order to enable it to function even better.

In conclusion, the Chinese delegation hopes that the review of work in the humanitarian field over the past year will lead to better efforts in summing up experiences and promoting dialogue, exchanges and coordination in humanitarian affairs, resulting in more enthusiastic responses to humanitarian needs and new contributions to the maintenance of peace and stability and joint development.

Mr. Samoilenko (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the delegation of Ukraine on sub-items 20 (b), "Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions", and (c), "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster".

The Chernobyl disaster occurred in the Ukraine, and after the explosion radioactive elements continue to have unforeseen consequences for mankind. It is for this reason that I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to this global catastrophe.

The mitigation of the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe has continued for over 13 years, and unfortunately we have to state that they will continue for more than a generation. At the earliest stages no one could have foreseen the scope of the catastrophe and all the aspects of its consequences — social, economic, international, humanitarian, environmental, technological and others.

The following figures eloquently illustrate the scope of the ecological consequences. More than 50 million curies of radioactive substances were released into the environment. The area contaminated as a result of the accident is 50,000 square kilometres in Ukraine alone, and the total surface of contaminated agricultural lands reached 3.5 million hectares. The real threat of long-term contamination of the Dnepr river, which is the main source of the water supply for more than 35 million Ukraine residents, still looms over the nation.

The disaster affected about 3.5 million inhabitants of Ukraine, who were subsequently taken under State social protection, including almost 82,000 people who have become invalids. I read the report that was made

available earlier. It contains a statistical error, for the number of invalids is much higher than the figure given. Their number increases daily — by 10 million a year — as a result of the deadly radiation. Children account for more than 1 million of the affected population.

The most difficult task involves the medical and biological consequences of the disaster because of its multifaceted impact, including, on the one hand, objectively measurable radiation doses and levels of environmental contamination and, on the other, socio-psychological factors, which are not a subject for quantitative analysis.

The real growth of sickness rates and the worsening of the psychophysical state of the population become more and more conspicuous year by year. Most disturbing is the fact that the number of cases of thyroid gland cancer among children has increased more than ten times as compared with the pre-disaster period. It is still not clear how the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster will affect the genetic and immunity status of the population.

The Parliament, the President and the Government of Ukraine are making all possible efforts to provide normal living conditions for the population in the radioactively contaminated regions and to improve health care and socio-psychological rehabilitation services. We have adopted appropriate legislative acts in the field of social security for the people who took a direct part in the nuclear accident mitigation and also for those affected by its consequences. About 7 per cent of State budget expenditure is allocated each year for these purposes, although the real requirements are higher. We must somehow acknowledge the fact that in reality 21 per cent of the budget is needed for this purpose but that so far we have been unable to meet that need.

One of the most difficult problems for Ukraine is related to the transformation of the shelter structure into an environmentally safe system. The shelter over the destroyed reactor was erected in less than half a year, thanks to the self-sacrificing efforts of builders, the professionalism of the specialists and the high technical capacities of the organizations taking part in its construction. Many of those who worked there are no longer alive. This highly sophisticated structure allowed us to reduce the fall-out of radioactive substances from the reactor to a minimum and to improve the radiation situation.

However, as experts have concluded, the short lifespan of the shelter has become a source of psychological stress for the population, as its hydro-technological characteristics present a threat for the whole region and for the water flow of the Dneper River. International cooperation has become very important to turn the shelter into an environmentally safe shell. For this purpose an international Chernobyl fund was established last year under the management of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which has available to it resources pooled from the countries of the Group of Seven, the European Commission, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Kuwait, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. From this rostrum, I would like to express our great gratitude to them.

Great help in mitigating the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe has come from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Unfortunately, we still have not solved the serious problem of fuel. There are about 180 tons of fuel and fuel-containing material concentrated in the shelter, a situation that presents a very serious potential threat. An equally difficult legacy are the more than 800 radioactive-waste "burial spots", as we call them. Their transformation from temporary facilities into a long-term system for radioactive waste storage is a technically and ecologically complex task that must be accomplished on an urgent basis.

We have to acknowledge that today we cannot give definite answers to some questions of vital importance. Is it possible, in principle, to mitigate the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster? How much time do we have to do this? How much will it cost? What will happen if we do nothing or postpone the solution of these problems to an indeterminate future?

We can assert that the scope and uniqueness of the catastrophe and its multiple aspects have become a real challenge for mankind. Realizing the need to draw on considerable material, financial and labour resources, we believe that the key factor should be the strengthening of international cooperation and attracting a number of highly skilled specialists and new technologies to resolve these problems.

The Chernobyl disaster created unique opportunities for comprehensive scientific research into nuclear and radiation disasters under real-life conditions. Joint international projects allow us to enrich the methodological arsenal and to significantly supplement the databases for further theoretical and practical research in the field of radiation impact on nature and living organisms.

Yesterday's meeting of the Quadripartite Committee on mitigating the effects of the Chernobyl catastrophe and today's consideration of this item in the General Assembly are no doubt important catalysts. We hope that through concerted efforts by international organizations and the Governments of individual countries the world community will undertake decisive steps towards eliminating the consequences of this major catastrophe in the history of humankind. We are counting on the authority of the United Nations in particular to solve the problems of Chernobyl, first and foremost because the United Nations does not allow — and we hope that it will not allow — relegating the problems of Chernobyl to the past, into a secondary category of "mankind's misfortunes of yesterday".

Unfortunately, we must point out that the problems of Chernobyl have recently come to be identified only with the closure of the nuclear power plant and the settling of the shelter issue. Many Governments and public organizations advocate the soonest possible closure of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, thereby relegating humanitarian aspects to the background. Taking into account the dimensions of the problem and its long-term nature, it is necessary to mobilize additional resources to continue Chernobyl projects. In this regard, we propose to hold a donors' meeting in the first half of the year 2000. We hope that this proposal will be supported.

We believe that in order for there to be better management of Chernobyl projects, it is necessary to establish the post of coordinator for Chernobyl questions in the United Nations office in Kiev, in the vicinity of the catastrophe's epicentre. We do not need any additional funding to do this.

I would like to emphasize that the General Assembly's resolution on this agenda item must ensure that Chernobyl continues to receive close attention from the international community. The United Nations has to remain the coordinator and catalyst for solving these problems. Indeed, the Chernobyl disaster showed that misfortune respects no national borders or political and social differences.

We call for international cooperation because the Chernobyl catastrophe has presented new and unusual tasks for the world community that are of exceptional complexity and as yet unknown scope. Only through integrated efforts and the help of highly qualified international specialists and new technologies representing breakthroughs in human knowledge can we solve these problems.

In conclusion, I would like to touch on yet another problem under this agenda item that is of concern to Ukraine. I am referring to the consequences of the Kosovo conflict on the vulnerable economies of southeastern Europe. As was quite correctly pointed out in the 1999 *Economic Survey of Europe*,

> "The economic impact of the Kosovo conflict ... is equivalent to a strong negative external shock which is aggravating further their economic situation." *(Vol. 2, p. 1)*

Of course, neighbouring States — including Ukraine — have also experienced serious economic losses. The interruption of navigation on the Danube River has paralysed the economic activity of most Ukrainian shipping companies, ports and businesses. Suffice it to say that the total losses incurred by Ukraine as a result of the war in Kosovo have exceed $300 million. Together with Romania, Bulgaria and other interested countries, we stand ready to participate in the efforts to clear the waterway in order to resume navigation on the Danube. In our view, this would greatly help to the alleviate humanitarian and economic hardships in the region.

In this regard, we cannot fail to agree with the Secretary-General, who stresses in his report on economic assistance to States affected by the implementation of Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in document A/54/534, that in the aftermath of the Kosovo crisis, economic assistance is urgently needed to address a variety of persisting economic and social problems of neighbouring and other affected States, both in support of the reconstruction and recovery efforts and on account of structural adjustment and economic transition in those countries.

I would like to thank all of you for your understanding our problems and for your readiness to settle them together with us.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to offer our condolences to the Government and people of the sisterly country of Turkey on the occasion of the devastating earthquake that struck that country earlier this week — the second such catastrophe to strike this friendly State in three months.

I should like from this forum to reiterate Kuwait's support for our brothers and sisters in Turkey in overcoming the consequences of those tragic events. It is perhaps timely that we are debating this item at a time when many States suffer annually from the devastating effects of natural disasters that are beyond the control of humankind.

I would recall here the devastation that hurricanes Georges and Mitch wrought in the States of the Caribbean region and the Latin American continent last year, as well as the floods and tidal waves that struck our sister State Bangladesh. These disasters require that the international community increase its material and moral support to their victims.

Kuwait fully recognizes the extremely limited resources and capabilities available to developing and small countries and their weak ecological and economic systems in meeting the challenges created by these natural disasters, which require concerted international efforts. In considering the dangers of these natural disasters, we must recognize that, regrettably, they are on the increase. In addition, thousands of people lose their lives as a result of man-made disasters such as wars and as a result of the use of deadly weapons. Although it is believed that these weapons can help bring about the settlement of long-standing disputes, their use ultimately aggravates the situation and results in widespread destruction due to narrow self-interests and destructive militarism.

We share the regret expressed by the Secretary-General, in his report on the work of the Organization, at the number of people killed in 1998 as a result of natural disasters and wars. The Secretary-General described that year as the worst in history, with natural disasters claiming the lives of more than 50,000.

In this context, my delegation would like to pay tribute to the efforts made by the Secretariat of the United Nations and the United Nations Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and to call attention to the need to raise awareness in this context in order to protect the safety and security of relief workers in the performance of their noble humanitarian functions. They deserve our support and encouragement.

Kuwait is aware of the suffering and frustration experienced by peoples and Governments as a result of losing two crucial components of development, namely the productive human factor, which is the key agent of development, and the material resources used by humankind as a means of achieving development goals and raising the standard of living to the desired levels. It is regrettable that losses are incurred in these two areas due to events that are beyond human control.

Kuwait also recognizes the burdens shouldered by developing and poor countries affected by these catastrophes in the areas of reconstruction and human rehabilitation, which are essential to development. This indeed is a very costly affair.

The Government and people of Kuwait have responded swiftly and spontaneously to these natural disasters, providing assistance by airlifting supplies to affected areas through a systematic and coordinated effort and under the supervision of the Government of Kuwait. This assistance is rendered in two phases: dispatching urgent in-kind and cash relief aid to the affected areas, and in the second stage providing grants and loans to those States to assist them in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process at all levels once the consequences of those disasters have been contained.

I wish to outline briefly some of the forms of aid offered by the State of Kuwait at both the governmental and public levels to friendly States in meeting the challenges posed by natural disasters. By way of example, let me note that the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development has offered Government grants and loans to friendly countries affected by natural disasters. From 1983 to August of this year, the Kuwait Fund has provided some $220 million to 12 affected countries in Asia, Africa and Europe, including loans to support rehabilitation programmes over the next five years.

In addition, Kuwaiti non-governmental organizations, including the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society, have, in 1998 and 1999, provided in-kind and cash assistance to countries ravaged by hurricanes, earthquakes and floods. An estimated $1.3 million was disbursed among the three continents that I mentioned.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm Kuwait's commitment, made in the course of the general debate,

to support development projects in many developing countries. This stems from our deep conviction that development and peace are organically linked and mutually supportive factors on which the prosperity and stability of human societies hinge.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am particularly pleased to express my thanks to the Secretary-General for the outstanding report he has submitted to us. The report clearly sets out all the numerous humanitarian activities undertaken by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in responding to the growing needs of people who are suffering from the consequences of natural disasters or domestic or inter-State wars, be they regional or international, as well as from intense economic and financial crises, which have increasingly affected a number of developing countries.

On this occasion, we would also express our condolences to and full solidarity with States that have recently experienced earthquakes, floods or other types of natural disasters. These disasters have taken the lives of thousands of victims and have seriously affected the social and economic infrastructures of those States.

We are particularly grateful to the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their efforts to contain many of these problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to the people who are affected. However, we note that these efforts do not meet all the basic needs of the people, partly because there has been an increase in such crises and their consequences, and partly because the assistance provided by donor countries has been dwindling considerably. That is why we call on the international community, in particular States that are most capable of doing so, to increase and consolidate their financial and humanitarian assistance to countries in difficulty so that they can deal with such crises and natural disasters.

We also call for increased international cooperation and the adoption of an appropriate, timely and long-term approach to coordinate assistance and the exchange of necessary information, in particular between United Nations specialized agencies and other international financial and development institutions in this field, so as to deal with crisis situations and phenomena.

We reaffirm our belief that humanitarian assistance must not replace measures aimed at containing or mitigating crises, conflicts and emerging occupation situations in the world. On the contrary, such measures should be carried out within the framework of peacekeeping operations and initiatives to ensure national reconciliation. That is why we call upon the parties involved in conflicts to respond favourably to such offers and initiatives of regional international mediation and good offices so as to resolve their disputes peacefully, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and the principles of international law, and on the basis of mutual respect for the human and civil rights of their peoples, regardless of their religious beliefs or ethnicity.

We believe that humanitarian assistance and relief should be properly channelled to those who are suffering and that international workers providing humanitarian assistance or relief should be protected. The international community must dissuade people from taking the lives of humanitarian workers or from taking them hostage. Such actions run counter to relevant international norms and human rights. We must strengthen the role of regional and international agencies in providing assistance to refugees and displaced persons for resolving their problems, justly and permanently, helping them to return home safely and compensating them for any damage done to them or to their property.

The Palestinian people are still facing a series of inhumane challenges and suffering as a result of Israeli occupation. Israel has extended its settlement policy, expropriated Palestinian land and plundered Palestinian natural and economic resources, to say nothing of the restrictions it has placed on the movement of the inhabitants of the occupied territories and its hindering of the activities and programmes of international agencies providing humanitarian assistance there. That is why we call on the international community to urge the Israeli Government to end its humanitarian, legal and moral violations and on States and financial and donor organizations to comply with their commitments to the Palestinian people so that they can set up their own developmental infrastructure and establish an independent State in Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Our deeply rooted traditions and culture form the basis of our society, which derives its strength from its belief in international and regional solidarity and our tolerant Islamic law. The President of our State, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan — may God protect him — has set up development and humanitarian institutions, as well as charities, such as the Zayed charity, the Red Crescent and the Abu Dhabi Development Fund to

complement local efforts in the private and public sectors to mobilize financial and moral resources to support developing countries and assist them in dealing with natural disasters and the effects of war or civil or regional conflict.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm the importance of respect for the sovereignty of States and for the protection of human rights and the maintenance of international peace and security to ensure sustainable development for all peoples. We call upon the United Nations and other regional and international organizations to strengthen their efforts to adopt necessary and effective mechanisms as soon as possible so they can increase their humanitarian and relief assistance and exchange information with the aim of mitigating the devastating effects of the disasters that have affected some countries. Such disasters may be ecological and natural, or they may result from economic developments or from the devastating effects of wars and conflicts, but they become more difficult to resolve as time goes by.

Mr. Farar (United States of America): We are here once again to bear witness to the seemingly endless plight of innocent victims in need of emergency humanitarian assistance. This year, as in years past, the international community has had to deal with the after-effects of natural disasters and wars throughout the world. From the cyclone in India to the fighting in Sierra Leone, the United Nations has been on hand, along with the Red Cross, donor Government aid agencies and non-governmental agencies, to provide food, water, blankets, shelter and other necessities of life to those who face devastating hardships.

The General Assembly is but one of the many actors on the world stage helping to ensure that emergency humanitarian assistance gets to those in need. Down the hall in this very building the Security Council is working on the root causes of the misery facing civilians, and especially children, touched by armed conflicts. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is working with many separate branches of the United Nations system to ensure that humanitarian needs are adequately met. My Government applauds OCHA and the other United Nations actors, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Health Organization, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Internally Displaced Persons, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and others, for the commendable work that they are doing. We encourage them to continue to coordinate their efforts under the able guidance of the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Over the past year, much of the world's attention has been focused on Kosovo, where we have seen the entire life cycle of a refugee population — from persecution to flight to repatriation — take place in a very compressed time-frame. Even as we were struggling to make peace in Kosovo sustainable, we were faced with a new crisis in East Timor. We are pleased to see that the humanitarian situations in Kosovo and in East Timor appear to be improving. The United Nations system deserves a great deal of credit for its work in alleviating those crises. We especially want to thank Sergio Vieira de Mello for his work in OCHA and in the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. New challenges lie ahead as he embarks on his role as the transitional administrator in East Timor.

Even though Kosovo and East Timor have grabbed the headlines, we remain keenly aware of the serious humanitarian problems that plague other parts of the world. We continue our support for humanitarian operations in Africa and elsewhere, and we encourage others to do the same. The United States, for its part, will allocate to Africa 50 per cent of its initial contribution to UNHCR for fiscal year 2000 in order to ensure that an equitable standard of care is provided to African refugees.

In this year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, we reaffirm the need for the international community to assist and protect populations affected by armed conflict, the need for all parties to ensure the safety of civilians, and the need to guarantee unimpeded and safe access by United Nations and other humanitarian personnel to those who require humanitarian assistance. Today we are particularly seized of the situation in Chechnya, and we call upon all parties to protect civilian populations and to allow safe access for humanitarian assistance. We also urge all countries to respond generously to the forthcoming United Nations appeals.

The question of security is particularly important to the United States. The international community must not stand by while refugees and displaced persons are exposed to cross-border attacks or forced recruitment, or are held hostage by armed elements within the camps, as has been happening in refugee camps in Guinea and in Liberia. In many places around the world, humanitarian

workers continue to be killed, kidnapped, injured or raped. The protection of these humanitarian workers is the primary responsibility of States. We call on States to investigate and to bring to justice those responsible for such attacks. The international community needs to move forward on a variety of options to help provide security for civilians and humanitarian personnel caught up in armed conflict, such as multinational civilian police and training for host country police.

I want to highlight the vulnerability of women and children during armed conflict. Physical and sexual abuse remains a widespread problem. It is the responsibility of all Governments to ensure the safety of women and children who have been forced to flee their homes and their lands, often without their husbands or fathers, and who depend on refugee-hosting countries and the international community for their safety.

We also remain concerned about the uneven and too often inadequate protection currently afforded to those who are internally displaced by armed conflict. We look forward to an opportunity to work with OCHA and the agencies members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to develop more predictable responses for ensuring that internally displaced persons receive the care and protection they need. We would like to commend the work done by Francis Mading Deng on establishing guiding principles on internal displacement. We advocate close cooperation among the relevant organizations of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, non-governmental organizations and States for ensuring the protection of internally displaced persons.

Over the past two years, the Security Council has addressed crucial humanitarian issues, including the protection of civilians in armed conflict, children and armed conflict, promoting peace and security, and protection for humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations. The United States welcomes the involvement of the Security Council in these issues, recognizing that humanitarian crises often involve situations that may pose a threat to international peace and security.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the energy and hard work that OCHA has brought to its core tasks of policy development, advocacy and coordination of humanitarian responses.

We look forward to the launch next week in Geneva of the consolidated appeals for 2000, and we note with pleasure the participation of the Secretary-General to underscore the importance of the humanitarian efforts of the United Nations. The consolidated appeals process should be used by the United Nations as a strategic planning tool as well as an appeal for humanitarian assistance. OCHA's field coordination role has enabled United Nations agencies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to work together more effectively. OCHA is also providing important information services through ReliefWeb and the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN). We support the Secretary-General's proposals for extending the use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund.

In closing, we believe that OCHA has more than adequately demonstrated its value, and we continue to believe that its funding should be among the priorities in the regular budget.

Mr. Moura (Brazil): Both natural and man-made disasters continue to cause pain and suffering, while the resources available to alleviate their consequences fall short of what is needed. There is a widespread belief that nothing can be done about natural disasters, and that natural catastrophes such as earthquakes, floods and hurricanes demand an *ex post facto* reaction. Although emergency relief for natural disasters is essential, preparedness is also crucial. If we cannot tame nature or stop natural disasters from happening, there is still the possibility of prevention.

As stated by the Secretary-General in his report on the work of the Organization (A/54/1), a number of Governments lack the funds for major risk-reduction and disaster-prevention programmes. International assistance is key in this regard and certainly makes a difference in mitigating damage and in reducing the need for humanitarian aid and reconstruction.

If prevention plays an important part with respect to natural disasters, it has an even greater role when it comes to so-called complex emergencies. "Complex emergency" is the euphemism used to appease our conscience in the face of situations in which human beings have their dignity abased on a large scale as a result of poverty and conflict.

Prevention has a broad meaning and does not lend itself to a short-sighted security approach. It has to do with the construction of solid pillars for society through cooperation for development, poverty eradication and the strengthening of the rule of law.

In our view, strategies to tackle humanitarian problems should focus on conflict prevention, peacemaking and post-conflict peace-building. The success of our endeavour depends on adopting an integrated approach to humanitarian action, one that takes into account the multiple dimensions of conflicts. Humanitarian problems cannot be adequately addressed unless the underlying causes of conflicts and complex emergencies are settled.

I wish to commend the work undertaken by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) under the leadership of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Let me highlight two aspects of United Nations humanitarian assistance that we deem essential to the effort to uphold human dignity. The first relates to coordination. The many different humanitarian agencies must work together in a coordinated effort to provide aid.

We commend the efforts of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to strengthen coordination mechanisms. The admission of the World Bank into the Inter-Agency Standing Committee last March is a most welcome development. It is fundamental to build on experiences such as the joint disaster response and recovery mission, OCHA, undertaken in all countries affected by hurricane Mitch, by OCHA, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization.

The coordination efforts must be based on the principle of shared responsibility and joint efforts to tackle humanitarian problems. The mandates can differ in nature. But the work of all humanitarian and development agencies, along with that of the United Nations main organs, is intertwined, since the overriding goal — the full enjoyment of basic human rights — is indivisible. We therefore attach great importance to the contribution that can be made by the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council in their respective spheres of competence with a view to producing a synergy in the field of humanitarian assistance.

The second aspect I would like to point out is that the concept of humanitarian assistance goes far beyond the phase of emergency aid. However, there is an ever-widening gap between the delivery of immediate relief assistance and longer-term development cooperation. People are easily touched by humanitarian disasters but frequently seem less willing to create an environment conducive to development. Post-conflict recovery and capacity-building are essential to address the consequences of many conflicts, including situations in which people remain displaced or return under precarious conditions. Development is crucial not only to address the consequences of conflicts but also to prevent wars from breaking out in the first place.

We welcome discussions under way — for instance among the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Bank, UNDP and other actors — on how to set up coordinating and funding mechanisms to facilitate the transition from emergency relief to development assistance.

My closing words are to praise the champions of this cause, the women and men risking their lives in trying situations around the world to provide hope for the hopeless. We are aware that the difficulty of providing aid to those in need is mounting, due to a vast array of factors.

One obstacle in the way of assistance stems from the very nature of most of today's conflicts. In internal conflicts, the difference between combatants and civilians is often blurred, with well-known, tragic consequences. In this context, assistance is considered an important asset, and in many instances, unfortunately, it is diverted by belligerents to meet their strategic designs. Needless to say, the humanitarian workers bear the brunt of this sort of action. Recent episodes in which the abnegation of humanitarian workers cost them their lives constitute examples that should not be forgotten.

It is urgent that all efforts be made, as a matter of the highest priority, to enhance the security and safety of humanitarian and United Nations personnel. It is equally urgent to assure the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian assistance, so as to enhance credibility and trust in conflict-ridden areas.

Mr. Jilani (Palestine, *spoke in Arabic*): At the outset and on behalf of my delegation, I would like to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his report in document A/54/134.

My thanks also go to Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan, who worked as the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories over the last three years, until 30 September 1999. Due to his high level of efficiency and his long and vast professional experience, he was able to fulfil the task entrusted to him and to his Office in the best manner, against all odds and under the most difficult, complex circumstances that prevailed in the

region over those three years, despite the various obstacles and difficulties stemming from the policy of closure and siege. On behalf of the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian people, we express our gratitude and appreciation to him as a loyal friend of the Palestinian people and wish him every success and happiness.

We would also like to welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to approve Mr. Terje Larsen as the new United Nations Coordinator for the peace process in the Middle East and as a Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. Mr. Larsen was in fact the first to fill this post, from 1994 until 1996. He is indeed a good and known friend who contributed significantly to creating the momentum for the peace process in the Middle East, particularly on the Palestinian track. We congratulate him most sincerely and wish him every success in his new mission and assure him of our readiness to cooperate with him for the success of his task.

At their meeting in Washington on 30 November of last year the donor countries pledged to provide assistance to the Palestinian people in the amount of 3 billion dollars over a five-year period. This pledge was reiterated during the recent meeting in Tokyo, held under the chairmanship of the Foreign Ministers of Japan and Norway in mid-October. Regrettably, these pledges have not been honoured and translated into action. Moreover, there has been a drastic 50 per cent decline this year in the annual contributions offered to the Palestinian people.

Once again we emphasize the importance of honouring the pledges undertaken by the donor countries, as well as the importance we attach to the contribution of the donor countries to the peace process and their assistance to the Palestinians to build and reconstruct their national institutions. Achieving economic and social development will help Palestinians eliminate their suffering and the consequences of the abominable occupation so they can contribute effectively, like all other free peoples, to the development and prosperity of the region. In this context, I should state that the Palestinian people greatly appreciate the efforts of the international community in this respect and would like to reiterate our gratitude to the donor countries for their continuous support.

The report reflects that for the first time since the beginning of the peace process there has been a slight improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinian people. This includes an increase in the gross domestic and national products as well as in the level of private investment. Moreover, the report points out that the economic improvement in 1998 was due to a reduction in the number of comprehensive closures in the occupied Palestinian territories. This fact underscores once again that Israel should refrain from implementing its policy of closures and state of siege, which has devastating effects on the Palestinian economy. We call upon Israel to put an end to its policy of using closures as a way of imposing collective punishment under all circumstances and conditions. We also call upon Israel to halt immediately its illegal practices, particularly the expansion and construction of settlements, as well as the confiscation of land and the demolition of houses.

The confiscation of land, the building of settlements and Israel's negative attitude towards the Palestinians will not increase the confidence of the peoples of the region in the peace process and in the chance of its success, nor increase the confidence of private investors. Credibility can be developed through the faithful honouring of the spirit and the letter of all agreements, without any delay, and by recognizing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their rights to return to their homes, to self-determination and to building an independent State. Recognition of these rights, as required by international legitimacy, is a prerequisite for a comprehensive, lasting and just peace in the Middle East.

We emphasize the important role that the United Nations plays in the achievement of this just, lasting and comprehensive peace, given its responsibility towards the Palestinians. Moreover, we would like to reaffirm the importance of the United Nations role in providing assistance to the Palestinian people, as well as the important role of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and of the Special Coordinator's Office in Gaza. This office should be strengthened and supported.

Mr. Darwish (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, on behalf of the people and the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt, I would like to express our profound condolences to our sister State Turkey on the recent earthquake that struck that country a few days ago. Our sympathies also go out to those countries that lost some of their citizens in the crash of the plane chartered by the World Food Programme, which was carrying relief personnel and supplies to Kosovo. I would also like

to thank the Secretary-General for his reports on the items under discussion.

The provision of humanitarian assistance in response to natural and man-made disasters is an indispensable and noble activity. The international community must support such assistance and work to maximize its effectiveness, as it must also continue to support the United Nations efforts to deal with natural disasters, as well as with the consequences of intra- and inter-State wars. Indeed the Secretary-General was right in stressing in his "Report on the work of the Organization", issued last September, that natural disasters should be at the top of the international agenda given the immense humanitarian and material losses they cause.

Although the number of inter-State wars has been declining remarkably, we note with regret a disturbing increase in new armed conflicts that are claiming growing numbers of human lives, destroying both physical infrastructure and human resources, and impeding development efforts in the States concerned. These conflicts have also resulted in the displacement of unprecedented numbers of people.

Egypt calls on all parties to armed conflicts to protect the rights of civilians and to ensure the safety and security of relief and humanitarian assistance workers. The Egyptian delegation also emphasizes that assaults on relief personnel should be treated as grave and inadmissible actions. At the same time, Egypt calls on relief workers to respect the laws and systems prevailing in the host countries. In deference to the principle of national sovereignty and in order to avoid the dangers that such personnel might be exposed to, the right of access to civilians in need of assistance — women, children and men — should be exercised by securing the approval of the States of which these needy people are citizens. Despite the difficulties that poor countries face in dealing with such issues, such as the lack of a strong central government, we call on the General Assembly to define the steps to be followed by the United Nations so it can deal with these difficult situations in a transparent manner and with the full participation of all States, large and small.

Egypt underscores the importance of the United Nations assuming a leading role in monitoring and assessing relief and humanitarian assistance efforts. Egypt calls on the United Nations and its organs and specialized agencies to provide assistance to States that need to build their institutional capabilities at the national level, and it calls on these bodies to accord adequate attention to the achievement of optimal coordination among all actors in this sphere, be they part of the United Nations system or of other relevant organizations. This should be done by implementing an integrated approach to dealing with natural disasters at all stages, from early warning to relief assistance, recovery, reconstruction and development.

The delegation of Egypt feels that the provision of adequate resources for this important activity would help the relevant organs fully meet their humanitarian obligations. In this regard, we underscore that these additional resources should not be taken from appropriations for development programmes and activities designed to benefit developing countries. Here we note with growing concern what the Secretary-General has mentioned in his report entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations": that the rate of response to consolidated appeals for the first five months of 1999 was approximately 30 per cent, that the geographical and sectoral distribution of the response was extremely uneven, and that this uneven funding means that contributions do not ensure a necessary minimum of care. Therefore, Egypt calls on the financially capable States and the international financial institutions to increase their contributions for humanitarian and relief assistance, in implementation of the principle of international solidarity and interdependence and in fulfilment of the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

In this regard, the Egyptian delegation supports the Secretary-General's proposal, made in the context of his proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, to increase the resources provided for responding to natural disasters. This proposal seems particularly worthy since it would be the first such increase in more than 15 years. Also in this regard, in order to examine the Secretary-General's proposals on the modalities of developing the mechanisms of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, we look forward to receiving the report of his review of this matter.

I wish to express our gratitude for the joint efforts undertaken by neighbouring Turkey and Greece to establish a joint unit to cope with natural disasters. Those two neighbours suffered devastating earthquakes in August and September. The challenge of dealing with their ordeal has unleashed their creative ingenuity. Egypt has become a co-sponsor of the draft resolution submitted by Turkey and Greece today.

I also wish to convey our appreciation to the friendly State of Argentina for co-sponsoring the draft resolution on the participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations. We welcome this important draft resolution, co-sponsored by Argentina and Egypt, among others, in recognition of the constructive role played by volunteers from all countries in relief activities. We also acknowledge the programmes and assistance provided by the United Nations Development Programme to the Palestinian Authority, *inter alia*, to help build its institutional capacities to fight disease and to meet the requirements of people with special needs. In Rwanda and the Balkans, it has helped to resettle refugees by providing low-cost housing and humanitarian assistance.

In closing, I wish, on behalf of Egypt, to express our sincere appreciation to all United Nations agencies operating in the Palestinian territories. These agencies are indeed contributing effectively to improving services in the development of the institutional capacities of the Palestinian Authority. Our thanks go to the European Union member States for sponsoring the draft resolution on this sub-item. On this occasion, Egypt calls on all donor countries to fulfil their pledges of assistance to the Palestinian people as it strives, at this critical stage, to build its independent State. Such assistance will certainly contribute to the evolution of the peace process to its ultimate conclusion: the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, hopefully in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Preware (Nigeria): The Nigerian delegation commends the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and excellent reports on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations. The reports bring out clearly both the increasing urgency and complexity in the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance and the scope of activities required to sustain continued international commitment.

The 1990s, unfortunately, saw an extraordinary rise in the number, scope and scale of natural disasters. In the last 23 months, in particular, we have witnessed the worst string of natural disasters. Forest fires, drought, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and so on have devastated many parts of the world. Developing countries have been particularly hard hit. The problems attendant on these tragic events have often been complicated by destabilizing wars.

One result of these conflicts has been the significant increase in the number of internally displaced persons and refugees in several countries. An estimated 500,000 people were displaced between January and May in Angola alone. The Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict has seen some 750,000 persons internally displaced. Today, some 237,000 refugees from Sierra Leone are in Guinea and Liberia, while over 140,000 remain internally displaced. International relief efforts have been seriously hampered by a combination of factors, including the lack of a rapid-response mechanism, ongoing conflicts and serious resource constraints.

While Nigeria welcomes the 30 per cent rise in the 1999 pledges for Africa, it notes with concern the increasing shortfall between actual needs and funds raised. The Secretary-General's report shows that, as of May this year, Africa's requirements for affected areas and States stood at $697.32 million, while available funds stood at only $193.74 million, representing a mere 26 per cent of actual need.

The difficulties of inadequate resources are further complicated by the uneven geographical and sectoral distribution of funds. The level of relief assistance extended to Kosovo in the Balkans, where some 1.2 million displaced persons were resettled in 2 months, contrasts very sharply with the situation in Angola, where some 1.6 million displaced remain largely ignored.

The international community must not feign unawareness of this sad contrast. It behooves the international humanitarian community to respond in a more balanced manner to the humanitarian needs of societies afflicted by these unfortunate elements of human misery. Natural disasters, wars, human displacement and refugee situations, wherever they occur, deserve fair humanitarian response. Nations and donor States, in responding to these situations, necessarily operate a range of mechanisms for financing post-conflict humanitarian efforts. Unfortunately, these mechanisms themselves very often create constraints, delays and difficulties. My delegation invites the international humanitarian community, especially donor countries, to seek ways and means of making humanitarian interventions more timely and fairly.

Nigeria welcomes the reform of United Nations activities relating to humanitarian assistance, which has led to the transformation of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs into the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We note the sense of purpose and focus given by the Office to the triple functions of policy development and coordination, advocacy of

humanitarian issues and coordination of humanitarian response. The streamlining of the various offices of the United Nations agencies, with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as the focal point, has quickened the decision-making process on humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

Nigeria is hopeful that the establishment of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as the principal forum for inter-agency coordination will enhance a coherent and clear division of responsibilities and accountability in the field, as stipulated in the Council conclusions of 1998. It is crucial that the Committee continue to develop a field-based system to strengthen the monitoring process in respect of programme targets and strategic objectives.

In responding to natural disasters, increased emphasis should be placed on how to strengthen disaster preparedness and early warning systems at the local, country and regional levels. Efforts should be made to identify regionally based experts to assist in improving the operational preparedness of Governments to meet emergency and disaster situations.

The commitment of Nigeria to the problem of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance has resulted in our adoption of national plans for disaster reduction and the establishment of the National Emergency Management Authority under the overall coordination of our newly created Ministry of Environment.

In conclusion, Nigeria strongly urges that special efforts be made to enhance the local capacity in disaster response and to utilize already existing capacities in developing countries which are closer to the site of disaster. What is therefore required is a well-coordinated partnership between the developed countries, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other members of the international community in this very important challenge. It is a challenge that strikes at the very foundation of the societies affected by these disasters. The international community must seek not only to sustain, but more importantly to strengthen, its response capacity to disaster and need.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.